The Pakistan Development Review
Vol. XXV, No. 3 (Autumn 1986)

Invited Lecture

Changes in Female Roles in Pakistan: Are the Volume and Pace Adequate?

NASRA M. SHAH*

The question that I have set out to answer in today's presentation is a value-laden one, since I plan to give you my perception of how adequately (or inadequately) the roles of women are changing in Pakistan. My conclusions are, however, based on an objective and scientific evaluation of the existing data. With regard to data, I do not need to belabour the subject of the shortage of data or the dearth of good quality data before an audience like the present one. The shortages and weaknesses of demographic and socio-economic data are all too well known to you. I will therefore go directly to setting out the organization of my presentation.

I will begin with a brief discussion of the terms of reference which have guided my analysis. This is followed by an investigation of the quantifiable changes in the roles of women. The time period covered under this section falls generally between 1951 and 1981, owing mainly to the availability of census data for these years. In the third section I will focus on the adequacy of changes in relation to national targets, as well as the international experience on the various indicators of change. In the final section, I will discuss the issues and complexities involved in bringing about changes in the existing roles and role definitions.

I. TERMS OF REFERENCE

There are four keywords that need to be defined for my analysis; namely role, volume, pace and adequate.

Role: The concept of female role is not unidimensional. A woman may hold several statuses and simultaneously perform different roles commensurate with those statuses. Some of these statuses may be high while others may be low. Some of her roles may be in conflict with each other (inter-role conflict): or there may be conflicting aspects within the same role (intra-role conflict). A useful framework to

*The author is consultant to the office of National Health Plan, Ministry of Health, Kuwait.

organize our thinking about the multidimensional nature of female roles was suggested by Christine Oppong of ILO in 1980 [7]. She has recently prepared a handbook suggesting ways and means for collecting and analysing data on this topic [8].

According to Oppong's scheme, a woman has seven distinct roles. These are:

–Parental,
–Occupational,
–Conjugal,
–Domestic,
–Kin,
–Community, and
–Individual.

Each of the above roles has certain activities associated with it and involves the use of resources such as time, knowledge, money and material goods. Each role also contains a certain amount of power and decision-making potential, and involves certain significant others. The scheme of data classification suggested by Oppong is reproduced in Table 1. A quick glance at the data demands of the suggested scheme makes it evident that in the case of the Pakistani woman, we cannot fill out all the cells due to lack of data. This is particularly true of the time allocated to various activities and the power and decision-making inherent in various roles. Despite the data shortages, the framework suggested by Oppong is useful for organizing the information available on Pakistani women's status, and has been used here.

Volume and Pace of Change: By volume of change I mean the change in the absolute numbers or volume of certain items. For example, the increase in the number of female schools or female students represents the volume of change over time. The pace in my scheme represents the proportionate or percentage increase over time. The two concepts are used singly or jointly, as necessary.

Adequacy: The adequacy of the volume and pace of change may be evaluated in terms of two specific criteria: (i) by comparison with other countries at similar levels of social and economic development, and (ii) by comparing the achievements over a given time period with the targets for change that have been set by policy-makers. I have attempted to do both of these exercises.

Before getting into questions of adequacy, however, a statement describing the various changes is necessary, and is given below.

II. CHANGES IN FEMALE ROLES

The analysis of changes in female roles is organized in terms of the seven roles identified above. Each is discussed here in turn.

Table 1

Seven Roles of Women Data Classification: Role Behaviours

Roles	Activities	Resource Use: Acquisition, Allocation, Management and Control			Power and Decision-making	Significant Others
		Time	Knowledge	Money and Material goods		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
1. Parental Role	111. PAREN ACTS	112. PAREN TIME	113. PAREN KNOW	114. PAREN MON	115. PAREN POW	116. CHILDREN *ET AL.*
2. Occupational Role	121. OCCUP ACTS	122. OCCUP TIME	123. OCCUP KNOW	124. OCCUP MON	125. OCCUP POW	126. CO-WORKERS *ET AL.*
3. Conjugal Role	131. CONJ ACTS	132. CONJ TIME	133. CONJ KNOW	134. CONJ MON	135. CONJ POW	136. SPOUSE *ET AL.*
4. Domestic Role	141. DOM ACTS	142. DOM TIME	143. DOM KNOW	144. DOM MON	145. DOM POW	146. DOM GROUP
5. Kin Role	151. KIN ACTS	152. KIN TIME	153. KIN KNOW	154. KIN MON	155. KIN POW	156. KIN
6. Community Role	161. COM ACTS	162. COM TIME	163. COM KNOW	164. COM MON	165. COM POW	166. NEIGHBOURS *ET AL.*
7. Individual Role	171. INDIV ACTS	172. INDIV TIME	173. INDIV KNOW	174. INDIV MON	175. INDIV POW	176. FRIENDS

Source: [8].

Parental Role

The parental role has always had a very high priority for the Pakistani female. To become a mother (particularly of a son) provides a good deal of elevation in her status. Cultural values prescribe the mother's position as one of respect, veneration and obedience. Islamic teachings lend full support to these values, resulting in well-known beliefs such as "the heaven lies under the mother's feet". Thus-in order to fulfill her parental role, a woman must bear children, particularly sons, since they are the protectors of family honour, and carriers of the family name. Such values have had an obvious pronatalist impact on the childbearing behaviour. Empirical indicators of such values consist of variables such as the ideal number of children, the children ever born and efforts for fertility control.

Fertility levels have declined slightly according to some analyses but the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) is still around 6 or more children (Table 2). In 1975, the percentage of contraceptive users was pitifully small, particularly in rural areas (Table 2). Close to half of the respondents did not even intend to use contraception. There is indication from the Population, Labour Force and Migration (PLM) Survey held in 1979-80 that the knowledge as well as use levels have declined even further [14]. If the trend found in the PLM Survey is correct and has continued, it is safe to conclude that the efforts at fertility control still continue to be minimal. The parental role is supreme and the values related to fertility control have not taken hold in the society as a whole. In fact, there seems to be a tendency in the opposite direction as evidenced by the apparent increase in the ideal family size, in both rural and urban areas, of 12 percent and 10 percent respectively. The subgroups of educated women, particularly in urban areas, have traditionally demonstrated a relatively larger tendency towards controlling their family size. A comparison of the 1975 Pakistan Fertility Survey (PFS) and 1979-80 PLM Survey suggests, however, that contraception may have declined even among the educated women (Table 2).

Several other empirical indicators may be used to analyse additional dimensions of the parental role. Examples are: time devoted to child-rearing, role expectations and satisfactions of parents, role strain and role conflict, and pressures for change. Unfortunately, data on these various dimensions are not available for a systematic study.

Occupational Role

The occupational role is particularly important, mainly because it provides a potential alternative role to the wife–motherhood role. The resource expansion that it provides to a working woman may be critical in many different ways. Yet, in Pakistan the occupational role is not a primary role that women are expected to

Table 2

Changes in Role Behaviours of Adult Pakistani Women in Rural and Urban Areas

Role	Urban			Rural		
	Earlier year	Later year	% change	Earlier year	Later year	% change
PARENTAL ROLE						
TFR	6.9[a] (1955-60)	6.2 (1979-80)	– 10	7.2[a] (1955--60)	6.6 (1979-80)	– 8
$\bar{X}$ Ideal Family	3.9 (1975)	4.3 (1979-80)	+ 10	4.3 (1975)	4.8 (1979-80)	+ 12
% Known of Contraception	83 (1975)	43.0 (1979-80)	– 48	73 (1975)	20.6 (1979-80)	– 72
% Use Contraception Currently	12.4 (1975)	7.7 (1979-80)	– 38	2.7 (1975)	1.8 (1979-80)	– 33
Never Used, will Use	53 (1975)	23[b] (1979-80)	– 57	59 (1975)	23[b] (1979-80)	– 61
% Use among Women with 5+ Grades	31 (1975)	18.6[c] (1979-80)	– 40	4 (1975)	7.7[c] (1979-80)	+ 93
OCCUPATIONAL ROLE						
% Age 10+ in the Labour Force	4.1 (1961)	3.3 (1981)	– 20	10.9 (1961)	3.5 (1981)	-- 68
% Employed as Un-Paid Family Workers	14 (1973)	5.9 (1981)	– 58	66 (1973)	38.2 (1981)	-- 42
% Worker in Professional Occupation	30.1 (1973)	34.6 (1981)	+ 15	4.2 (1973)	8.3 (1981)	+ 98
% Workers in Service Occupations	26.8 (1973)	17.0 (1981)	– 36	4.0 (1973)	4.4 (1981)	+ 10

– *Continued*

Table 2 – (*Continued*)

Role	Urban			Rural		
	Earlier year	Later year	% change	Earlier year	Later year	% change
% Workers in Agricultural Occupation	6.9 (1973)	3.4 (1981)	– 51	78.9 (1973)	51.6 (1981)	– 35
CONJUGAL ROLE						
% Single at Age 15–19	46.6[b] (1961)	77.6 (1981)		46.6[b] (1961)	67.1 1981)	
Singulate Mean Age at Marriage (SMAM)	17.6[b] (1961)	21.4 (1979-80)		17.6[b] (1961)	19.6 (1979-80)	
% Divorced at Age 30–34	0.3 (1972)	0.4 (1981)		0.5 (1972)	0.6 (1981)	
DOMESTIC ROLE						
Time Spent on Domestic Tasks	u	u		u	14 hours and 30 minutes[c] (1976)	
KIN ROLE						
% Living in Nuclear Families		44 (1975)			47 (1975)	
COMMUNITY ROLE						
% Members of National Assembly	4.3 (1971)	8.4 (1985)		e	e	

Table 2 – (*Continued*)

% Members of Provincial Assembly	3.7 (1971)	4.5 (1985)		e	e	
INDIVIDUAL ROLE						
% Literate (Age 10+)	33 (1973)	37.3 (1981)	+ 13	6 (1973)	7.3 (1981)	+ 22
% with Primary Education (Age 10+)	17 (1973)	14.5 (1981)	– 15	3 (1973)	3.9 (1981)	+ 30
% with B.A. or Higher Education (Age 10+)	1 (1973)	2.2 (1981)	+ 120	0.1 (1973)	0.1 (1981)	0
% of Girls 10–14 in School	45 (1973)	41.1 (1981)	– 9	10 (1973)	7.3 (1981)	– 27
% Observe Purdah	82 (1968-69)	87 (1982)	+ 6	47 (1968-69)	u	u

Sources: [5].

[a]Based on the 1975 PFS survey.

[b]For total country.

[c]Represents the groups with secondary or higher schooling.

[e]The members of national and provincial assemblies represent both urban and rural areas.

[u]Unavailable.

Notes: Numbers in parentheses represent the dates of the various censuses and surveys on which the data are based. The corresponding surveys/censuses for the various years are:

1961 Census of Population.
1968-69 National Impact Survey.
1972 Census of Population.
1973 Housing, Economic and Demographic (HED) Survey.
1975 Pakistan Fertility Survey.
1979-80 Population, Labour and Manpower (PLM) Survey.
1981 Census of Population.
1982 Basic Needs Survey of Lahore Squatters.

fulfil. The existing research indicates that with the exception of some educated urban women, most of the Pakistani women enter the labour force because they have a financial need for work rather than any glorious self-actualizing notions. In most cases, work participation is prestige-reducing rather than prestige-enhancing. These are perhaps some of the reasons why labour force participation rates (LFPRs) have been traditionally so low. The 1951–1973 censuses and the various Labour Force Surveys indicated an LFPR of around 5–10 percent. This rate seems to have gone down further in recent years. A comparison of the 1961 and 1981 censuses shows that the LFPR went down from 4.1 to 3.5 in urban areas and from 10.9 to 3.3 in rural areas (Table 2).

A discussion of the above rates and the apparent decline is not complete without a look at the modes of data collection and the various biases inherent in them. I have proved (successfully I think) in my own research on the subject that censuses usually underestimate female work participation in comparison with household surveys of the women themselves. The rates reported in household surveys are generally twice as high as, if not higher than, the typical rates reported in the censuses. Reporting variations associated with the nature of questionnaire, the interviewer (male or female) and the respondent were also found in the PLM Survey [3]. Despite the large discrepancies in various sources, however, researchers would generally agree that the work role is not a central one in the lives of most women.

Within this general picture, a numerically small, yet socially potent, group of women is emerging. This consists of the highly educated, largely urban women generally in professional and technical occupations. As a percentage of the urban female labour force, this group is sizeable – with 35 percent of all urban working women in it in 1981 (Table 2). As a percentage of all urban women aged 10+, however this group constitutes only 1 percent; of all women aged 10+, they constitute a mere 0.3 percent. Despite its small number, this group is important since it contains the innovators likely to be significant in providing role models for a possible future change. Among the rural women over half are engaged in agricultural occupations (as expected). The group of professional women has expanded notably in rural areas from 4 percent to 8 percent of the female labour force. Yet, overall female work participation in the rural areas has declined by 68 percent between 1961 and 1981. Some possible reasons for the decline could be the mechanization of farming and a growing affluence of rural families compared to the past.

There is clear indication from the data (not shown here) that the socio-economic status of the family has a negative impact on female work participation. Indicators such as husband's education and ownership of durable goods show a negative association with work participation. Irfan [3] found that household income per adult equivalent was negatively associated with wage employment, but did not affect self-employment of women.

Among other constraints on the occupational role of women, norms regarding purdah observance by women are especially significant. The fact that purdah observance and work participation are negatively associated is well proven, even though we do not understand the causal relationship between the two. In a survey of squatter households that I conducted in Lahore city in the summer of 1982, I found that about twice as many women who did not observe purdah had ever worked as the ones who wore an all-covering cloak, *burqah* (44 percent and 23 percent respectively). Moreover, a striking majority (87 percent) of those who wore the *burqah* worked at home, and about two-thirds were engaged in tailoring occupations, i.e. majority were in the informal sector. Thus, purdah norms affect work participation in several different ways. They either discourage participation completely, or they define as permissible only certain jobs in segregated settings such as in female schools or colleges, or at home in tailoring and handicraft occupations, etc. Yet, purdah observance still continues to be highly prevalent in Pakistan, as indicated by the Lahore study which showed that 87 percent of the women either wore a *burqah* or a *chader* (sheet of cloth); this is consistent with the country-wide data provided by the National Impact Survey held about 14 years earlier, and the proportion is in fact 6 percent higher (Table 2).

What I have described above about the occupational role of women is only part of the picture. It relates mainly to their activities. We know very little about other dimensions such as the time devoted to such activities, the income earned from them, or the power inherent in the occupational role. Information on these additional aspects is, of course, necessary for a more comprehensive picture.

Conjugal Role

Like the parental role, the conjugal role is again a highly central one in the life of a Pakistani woman. All Muslims, male and female, are required to marry and fulfil their sexual and procreative needs within marriage. Therefore, marriage is nearly universal as indicated by the negligible percentages (less than 5 percent) of women who have never married after the age of 30.

Some significant indicators of the conjugal role of women are the age at marriage, likelihood of divorce and widowhood, and the interaction with the marital partner. The age at marriage has been rising in Pakistan since the time of the first census held in 1951. This change is occurring in both rural and urban areas, but more markedly in the latter. The Singulate Mean Age at Marriage (SMAM) for females in urban and rural areas was 21.4 years and 19.6 years respectively according to the PLM survey. Consequently, the percentage of women who are single at ages 15–19 has risen (Table 2).

There seems to be agreement among demographers that the most significant correlates of the rise in age at marriage include urban residence, educational attainment above the primary level, and work experience before marriage, particularly for

cash income [1; 6]. These findings indicate that a change in the conjugal role also involves, and in some cases requires, a change in certain other roles. There are essential linkages between various roles, and a change in one automatically affects the others.

With regard to changes in marital status during the life cycle, marriage is more likely to be severed by the death of a spouse than by divorce. In the 1981 census, for example, 9 percent of the women aged 10 and over were widowed compared with only 0.4 percent who were divorced. It is likely that divorcees are under-reported since divorce is considered shameful and undesirable in Pakistan. The incidence of widowhood among the older women is quite high: 46 percent among the rural and 52 percent among the urban women aged 60+. While few marriages of young women are dissolved due to divorce or widowhood, the Pakistan Fertility Survey estimated that among the women aged 15–49 about 4 percent were married more than once. Among those whose marriage was dissolved on account of divorce or widowhood, about half remarried [1].

Interspousal interaction, particularly the power relations and decision-making among couples, is an important aspect of conjugal life on which very little research has been done in Pakistan. From the meagre data available, however, we know that the husband's approval (or disapproval) is an important factor in determining whether the wife will indulge in a certain kind of behaviour or not. In the case of family planning use, for instance, couples among whom both spouses recognized the need to secure the other spouse's approval, 44 percent of the urban couples and 34 percent of the rural couples reported use of contraception. These percentages are indeed very high in view of the negligible percentages of those who report contraceptive use among all couples.

The wife's occupational behaviour is also likely to be significantly affected by the knowledge of the spouse's approval or disapproval. In my Lahore study, among a subgroup of non-working women who approved of work themselves, 74 percent said that they would not take up a job since their husbands disapproved of this. On the other hand, among those who thought their husband would approve of such activity, 80 percent were willing to take up a job. Given the importance of the husband's attitudes and beliefs in conditioning the lives of their wives, in-depth surveys to study these interactions are necessary.

Domestic Role

Given the primacy of the parental and conjugal roles and the purdah norms of the society, a woman's domestic role obviously becomes an important one. She is responsible for most of the housework such as cooking, cleaning, fetching water and firewood, milking the cows, taking care of small children, etc. According to perhaps

the only estimate available in this regard, a Pakistani woman spends about 14.5 hours on such chores every day [5]. Needless to say that her work is essential for family survival but is often undervalued in comparison with that of the male members of the family. This is a point on which women's groups have often agitated around the world, and some are making headway.

Since a woman manages the household, she wields a certain amount of power in handling money or grains, and in the distribution of food to various family members. She can create considerable difficulty by refusing to co-operate in the management of the house, but she runs the risk of losing her conjugal status if she does so. In most households, the norms which govern her behaviour and that of other family members towards her, are based on centuries old traditions and beliefs.

Kin Role

A Pakistani woman has little identity as an individual. She exists primarily as a member of a kin group – as someone's daughter, sister, wife, or mother. A few women perhaps do achieve a status based on their own achievements or their career, but the significance of the other roles does not diminish. The kin role assumes an even greater significance in a situation in which the family structure is nuclear. This is true in the case of about half of all households in Pakistan.

In-depth studies about the interactions between various kin group members are again essential for the identification of those elements that are likely to constitute the greatest constraints to an improvement of the women's status.

Community Role

In view of the parental, conjugal and domestic roles discussed above, a woman's community role is only of secondary (or even tertiary) importance. In fact, it is not yet agreed whether the community is her legitimate domain. According to the Constitution of Pakistan she supposedly has equal rights to participate in all spheres of national life, including politics. Yet, certain seats have had to be reserved for her in the national and provincial assemblies to ensure her participation. This is a privilege given to women since it was perhaps realized that they do not stand a chance to win a seat contested by male opponents. The right to vote is, of course, present, more as a result of a historical accident than from the desire for planned social change aimed at improving the status of women.

According to the more traditional elements in the society, a relatively legitimate community activity is women's participation in non-governmental voluntary organizations like the All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA). In recent years, a more vocal group, the Women's Action Forum (WAF), has, of course, emerged and is the only organized group which is directly questioning the policies and

decisions it considers unjust. In general, however, an average woman's participation in community activities is negligible, if not non-existent.

Individual Role

The individual role includes activities and issues such as pursuit of education, physical mobility associated with migration, and restrictions on mobility associated with purdah requirements. Female literacy has increased a little over the last intercensal period but is still very low, 37 percent of the urban and only 7.3 percent of the rural females aged 10 and over being literate (Table 2). What is of even greater concern is the apparent decline in enrolment rates in both rural and urban areas, amounting to 27 percent and 9 percent respectively. This suggests that the expansion of educational facilities has not kept pace with the increase in the population of school-going children.

The parental aspirations for, or resistance to, female education seems to be a critical variable in female literacy. A considerable amount of resistance still seems to be present, at least in the rural areas. In a village study conducted in 1980, about one-third of the parents said it was not necessary to give any formal education to girls. The resistance is much lower in urban areas. The aspirations for the education of children become higher as the mother herself becomes educated. In my Lahore study, for example, a significant positive association was found between mother's own education and her aspirations for her daughter's education.

The constraints on physical mobility associated with the purdah norms was discussed earlier in the context of occupational behaviour. The patterns of geographical mobility also indicate that a typical migrant is a female moving with her family. Migration for educational or occupational pursuits is relatively rare. Female migration on account of marriage is a significant percentage of the total female migration. According to the PLM data, for example, migration associated with marriage constitutes 62 percent in rural areas had 46 percent in urban areas [4]. One subgroup for which migration seems to be relatively high consists of divorced, educated women, some of whom are perhaps moving in order to take up a job [11].

Finally, two individual characteristics not discussed so far relate to morbidity and mortality among females. It is well known that female mortality is higher than male mortality in Pakistan and that the expectation of life at birth is still around 50 years. Morbidity data are either non-existent or of poor quality, although the level of morbidity appears to be fairly high according to my Lahore study. Forty-two percent of the currently married women and 62 percent of the widowed/divorced/separated women reported that they had been seriously ill during the year prior to the study. The most common reasons for illness were fever, respiratory illness, pains and aches, blood pressure, and gynaecological problems.

In summary, a typical Pakistani female is born into a household where her birth is greeted with relatively little joy. She spends her childhood learning the chores that her mother has performed all her life. She marries at the age of 16 or 17 and moves into her husband's family. Her conjugal, domestic, parental, and kin roles are central roles. A small minority enters occupational roles and participate in community activities at the public level.

The seven roles described above are distinct yet overlapping in nature. A change in one of them may bring about significant changes in the others. For example, participation in the labour force affects the conjugal role by delaying marriage. Similarly, it may reduce a woman's domestic role by enabling her to buy the services of a maid. In general, the occupational and community roles are likely to be particularly significant in bringing about changes in the other roles, especially if the occupations are in the formal sector and provide cash income. Such roles are likely to provide what I call an 'alternative identity' in comparison with the traditional 'wife-motherhood roles'. I will, however, not dwell on this point since this situation applies to a very small percentage of adult Pakistani women at the present time.

Next, I will present my analysis of the adequacy of changes in female roles.

III. ADEQUACY OF CHANGES IN FEMALES ROLES

The foregoing analysis showed that when data from an earlier year are compared with those of the latest available year, the following conclusions emerge. One, the centrality of the parental role has increased over time as judged from the higher ideal family size and lower contraceptive use. Two, the significance of the occupational role has declined, since a smaller percentage of women seem to be participating in this role now than before. Three, the conjugal role is still highly prevalent and significant but begins at a later age than before. Four, the individual participation in the educational system seems to have declined, as indicated by the lower enrolment rate. In sum, most of the trends seem to be moving in a direction opposite to the one that one would have hoped for.

A further analysis of the changes in female role is possible by comparison with countries at roughly the same level of development and belonging to the same cultural region. This is done in Table 3. India and Bangladesh represent countries with generally the same cultural values concerning the roles of women but a slightly lower economic level. Sri Lanka is at about the same economic level but culturally quite different. The Philippines and Malaysia are included in the table only to show the contrast. The data for this table come mainly from a publication of the U.S. Bureau of the Census that was prepared by me [12].

The significance of parental role is again clearly indicated both by the relatively high total fertility rate (TFR) and by the low contraceptive use in Pakistan compared with the other countries. The only country that had a TFR higher than

Pakistan's was Bangladesh (Table 3). Unlike the high TFR, changes in the age at marriage are more marked in Pakistan than in India or Bangladesh. The percentage of females aged 20–24 who were single is substantially higher (in both rural and urban areas) in Pakistan than in the other two countries of the subcontinent. The datas are, however, not comparable and the situation may have changed in the other countries over the last decade. Whatever the changes in the conjugal status, the male is still regarded as the household head in Pakistan. Only about 1 percent of the heads were reported to be female in 1973; this compares with 17 percent females who were household heads in Sri Lanka and about 20 percent in Malaysia.

The occupational role seems to have become the least significant in Pakistan compared with that in other countries, with lower participation rates than those in India or Bangladesh. The percentage of unpaid family workers in Pakistan was about the same as in Bangladesh but substantially higher than in India. About 28 percent of the Pakistani female labour force was employed as unpaid family workers. The percentage of unpaid family workers was even higher in the Philippines and Malaysia but both those countries had close to one-third of their females aged 10+ in the labour force. Pakistani females make a negligible contribution to the overall (measurable) economic activity in the country compared with countries like the Philippines, Malaysia, or even India, as indicated by the female share of the labour force shown in Table 3. Despite her low participation rate in the labour force, there seems to be an 'elitist' tendency in the occupational structure of Pakistani women compared with the corresponding structures in the other countries. The percentage of women engaged in professional work was 17 percent in Pakistan compared with only 3-4 percent in India and Bangladesh, and 9 percent in Malaysia. Assuming that the data are accurate, the high concentration in professional occupations once again reflects the permissibility and desirability of occupations such as educational and medical that have been traditionally found in Pakistan.

With regard to an indicator, such as life expectancy at birth, Pakistani women are in a slightly better position than Indian or Bangladeshi women, but all three share the pattern of higher female than male mortality. Sri Lanka, with her lower GNP per capita than Pakistan's, has attained a life expectancy (e_0) about 15 years higher than that in Pakistan (65.8 years and 50.7 years respectively). The Sri Lankan example is particularly significant in highlighting the importance of other social characteristics such as female education. Eighty-two percent of the Sri Lankan females were literate in 1981 compared with 16 percent of the Pakistani females aged 10+. The differential in school enrolment was particularly marked in rural areas: 81 percent of the Sri Lankan females aged 10–14 were in school compared with only 7 percent of the Pakistani females in the same age group. It may also be noted that Pakistani females have lower literacy levels and enrolment rates compared with

Table 3

Comparison of Role Behaviour of Pakistani Women with Selected Asian and Southeast Asian Countries

Indicators	Countries					
	Pakistan	India	Bangladesh	Sri Lanka	Philippines	Malaysia
PARENTAL ROLE						
TFR	6.5	5.7	7.0	3.8	5.0	4.6
% Using Contraception (Age 15–49)	(1979-80)	(1971)	(1978-79)	(1977)	(1977)	(1976)
OCCUPATIONAL ROLE						
% 10+ in Labour Force in Rural Areas	3.3 (1981)	16.0 (1981)	3.8 (1974)	19.9 (1971)	32.1 (1970)	34.8 (1970)
% 10+ in Labour Force in Urban Areas	3.5 (1981)	7.3 (1981)	5.8 (1974)	11.1 (1971)	34.8 (1970)	23.7 (1970)
Unpaid Family Workers as a% of Female Labour Force	27.9 (1981)	3.6 (1971)	30.8 (1974)	11.2 (1971)	29.4 (1970)	37.7 (1970)
F/M Ratio of Unpaid Family Workers (Male = 1.0)	1.91 (1981)	1.29 (1971)	4.11 (1974)	3.11 (1971)	1.9 (1970)	3.4 (1970)
% Workers in Professional Occupations	17.2 (1981)	3.6 (1971)	2.9 (1974)	8.0 (1971)	17.2 (1977)	8.6 (1970)
Female Share in Labour Force (%)	3.7 (1981)	17.4 (1971)	4.2 (1974)	26.2 (1971)	31.5 (1977)	31.8 (1970)
CONJUGAL ROLE						
% Household Head Who are Female	1.0 (1973)	u	u	17.4 (1981)	10.8 (1970)	19.7 (1970)
Percent Single among Females Aged 20–24, Rural Areas	23.2 (1981)	6.8 (1971)	2.5 (1974)	53.1 (1981)	u	33.7 (1970)
Percent Single among Females Aged 20–24 Urban Areas	33.5 (1981)	19.0 (1971)	10.1 (1974)	62.8 (1981)	u	57.7 (1970)

Table 3 – (*Continued*)

Indicators	Countries					
	Pakistan	India	Bangladesh	Sri Lanka	Philippines	Malaysia
INDIVIDUAL ROLE						
Life Expectancy at Birth, Males	51.4	50.8	49.5	62.9	59.5	58.6
Females	50.7	50.0	46.9	65.8	64.4	62.1
F/M Ratio (ale = 1.0)	0.99 (1976)	0.98 (1976-77)	0.95 (1964-65)	1.05 (1972)	1.08 (1976)	1.06 (1970)
Infant Mortality Rate						
Boys	132	120	151		72	39
Girls	132	131	145	38	56	30
F/M Ratio (Male = 1.0)	1.00 (1976)	1.09 (1978)	0.96 (1977-78)	(1978)	0.78 (1976)	0.77 (1975)
% Literate (Age 10+), Total	16.0 (1981)	29.0 (1981)	16.2 (1974)	82.4 (1981)	82.2 (1970)	46.8 (1970)
% Literate (Age 10+), Urban Areas	37.3 (1981)	55.5 (1981)	36.4 (1974)	91.0 (1981)	91.8 (1970)	57.5 (1970)
% Enrolled Age 10–14, Rural Areas	7.3 (1981)	29.2 (1981)	23.6 (1974)	81.0 (1981)	75.5 (1970)	u
% Enrolled Age 10–14 Urban Areas	41.1 (1981)	65.5 (1981)	46.5 (1974)	84.3 (1981)	85.7 (1970)	u
F/M Ratio of % Enrolled in School among Age 10–14 (Male = 1.0)	0.54 (1981)	0.60 (1981)	0.64 (1974)	0.99 (1981)	1.02 (1970)	u

Sources: Population Census Organization [10]; [12].
u – Data unavailable.
Note: Number in parenthesis represents the year for which the data are shown.

Indian females. Finally, in terms of the ratio of females/males in school, the ratio was the lowest in Pakistan compared with all the other countries. That is, per 100 male children aged 10–14, only 54 females (ratio = 0.54:1) were enrolled in school in Pakistan; comparable ratios for India and Sri Lanka were 0.60:1 and 0.99:1. The

relative enrolment ratio of males to females provides a clear indication of discrimination against the females in terms of literacy and education.

The current development planners are, however, amply aware of the above imbalances and have prepared ambitious targets to change the situation in the future, as discussed below.

Adequacy in Relation to National Targets

An improvement in the situation of women is a categorically stated target of the current five-year plan in Pakistan. Some of the quantitative targets set for the plan period, 1983–88, are shown in Table 4 together with the value of the indicator in question, based on the latest available data. The sources used for Table 4 are other than the Planning Commission's own benchmark estimates for 1983, since they appear to be generally more optimistic than independent sources would lead us to believe.

The government plans to reduce the TFR to 5.4, and to increase the percentage of acceptors among couples, with wife aged 15–44, to 18.6 percent (Table 4). The changes that have occurred with regard to the ideal family size as well as knowledge and use of contraception in recent years would lead one to predict that accomplishing the above goals of fertility and contraception would be quite difficult, if not impossible.

With regard to women's occupational role, the government plans to increase the percentage of females in government service from 3 percent to 10–15 percent through quotas. I have no data to indicate the extent to which this target is being met. My only comment on the target is that it covers only the urban, educated women who comprised about 32 percent of the female labour force in 1981. With regard to the uplift of rural women, there are plans for encouraging local bodies and voluntary agencies to set up centres aimed at improving the level of literacy and providing population welfare and other health services.

In terms of mortality and education, the government plans to reduce the infant mortality rate (IMR) to 50 per 1000 live births and to raise life expectancy at birth to 60 or more years by 1988. This again seems overly ambitious in the light of the very high IMR (143) ten years earlier. Also, the social conditions like female education and the health infrastructure are developing too slowly to make the above goal achieveable.

By the end of the Plan period, the government aims at increasing the enrolment of girls at primary level in rural and urban areas to 50 percent and 90 percent respectively. Given the very slow pace of growth in the past, the above targets cannot

Table 4

Changes in Role Behaviours in Comparison with Government Targets

Parental Role	Target for 1988	Approximate Value for Latest Available Year
Total Fertility Rate, Women 15–49	5.4	6.5 (1979-80, PLM)
% Acceptors among Married Couples, Wife Aged 15–44	18.6	3.3 (1979-80, PLM)
Occupational Role		
% Females in Govt. Service	10-15 through Quota	3(1983 Plan)[b]
Conjugal Role	No. Quantitative Target in Plan	
Domestic Role	No. Quantitative Target in Plan	
Kin Role	No. Quantitative Target in Plan	
Community Role	No. Quantitative Target in Plan	
Individual Role		
Reduction in Infant Mortality to:	50 per 1000 Live Births	143 (1970-75, PFS)
Increase in Life Expectancy to:	60 + years	52.9 for Males/ 1968-1971
Enrolment of Girls at Primary Level		51.8 for Females, PGS
Rural Areas (%)	50	7.3 (1981, Census, ♀ 10–14 in School)
Urban Areas (%)	90	41.1 (1981, Census, ♀ 10–14 in School)
Number Literate Adult Females	Additional 10 Million	4.2 Million Age 10+ (1981, Census)

Source: Planning Commission, 1983; various census and surveys as listed in the note to Table 2.

[a]Based on the Sixth Five Year Plan (Planning Commission, 1983).

[b]Planning Commission, 1983; 350.

be accomplished without a revolution in the educational facilities as well as the parental attitudes towards education in rural areas. Furthermore, the enrolment rate in both rural and urban areas among females aged 10–14 actually declined between 1973 and 1981. To reverse this trend and to raise the rural rate seven-fold or more would need a miracle.

Finally, the government has launched a massive literacy programme and plans to enrol more females than males in it – 10 million and 5 million respectively. Again, I do not have the requisite data to evaluate the accomplishments of this effort.

On the whole, the government targets for changes in female status and roles seem unrealistically ambitious. However, the categorical recognition of the existing imbalances, and a commitment to eliminating such imbalances is a highly needed and commendable approach. The government programmes are aimed at eliminating "three crippling handicaps: illiteracy, constant motherhood and the primitive organization of work" [9, p. 348]. The general approach that the Plan adopts in achieving its objective is integrated in nature. It "rejects the notion of separate but equal development. Most of the programmes for women are integrated into each sector, not segregated" [9, p. 348]. While the development programmes for the two sexes can be effectively implemented only through an integrated approach, certain cultural ingredients of the society, which require segregation of sexes, must nevertheless be taken into account and dealt with in a manner which is not discriminatory against women.

IV. TOWARDS THE FUTURE

The programmes for increased literacy and education, improved health and life expectancy and lower infant mortality are all absolutely essential. However, two equally important issues that are not so easily quantifiable relate to the cultural biases against women in whatever role they exist. And, secondly, they concern the need to clearly define what the 'appropriate' roles of women are. Cultural discrimination against women is neither a new phenomenon nor restricted to Pakistan. There are many historical reasons for the present role-definitions of women around the world, some of which are elucidated in Professor Naqvi's foreword to my recent book on Pakistani women [11]. In the case of Pakistan, many of the cultural traditions and norms go back to the pre-independence period and the influence of the Hindu religion on the life of the subcontinent. The institution of dowry, for example, has its roots in the centuries old traditions of the subcontinent. Within the Islamic framework of Pakistan, this institution should have weakened, but this has not happened despite legislation to this effect. In fact, the customs surrounding marriage and dowry seem to be getting more complex and expensive than before.

In general, there is a fair amount of disagreement among various elements of the society about what the appropriate role of a Pakistani woman is, or should be. Some scholars (e.g. the late Maulana Maudoodi) would have us believe that the only legitimate role for a woman is that of a wife and mother; her legitimate space of existence is home. The same scholars are against the institutionalization of contraceptive use as a State policy. On the other hand, there are the more liberally oriented persons who believe that women have an equal right to participate in all activities outside the house. Between these extreme interpreters of women's appropriate roles, there are a whole lot of people who, in their every day life, make compromises to suit their own situation.

The lack of a clear perception about appropriate roles of women in a society like Pakistan was clearly echoed in a speech given by President Zia-ul-Haq to the National Conference of Women in October 1980. He raised the following questions [2]:

1. What role can women play in establishing an Islamic society in Pakistan?
2. What will be their obligations and rights in an Islamic society and how can these rights be protected?
3. What are the un-Islamic customs and traditions against the rights of women, and what steps can be taken to do away with them?
4. What administrative structure is needed to enable women to play an effective role in national reconstruction, and how can it be set up?
5. What measures should be adopted to establish special institutions for religious education and advanced training of women, and how can resources be generated for them?
6. What ways and means may be adopted to do away with the indifference women are suffering from in the fields of education, health, and general services? What services can the women render in the jihad for the eradication of ignorance, poverty, and disease from the country?

The above questions clearly indicate that many of the basic issues with regard to a redefinition of the role and status of Pakistani women are still unsettled.

If an objective and fair-minded exercise were carried out in order to define and institutionalize all the rights given to women by Islam, the situation of Pakistani women would look very different from what it is today. This exercise is, however, complicated by two unfortunate facts. One is the highly conservative interpretation of the religious dictates by scholars who consider themselves to be custodians of Islam. The second is the existence of certain cultural values which make it difficult

to implement and provide the rights granted to women by Islam. An example of certain religious prescriptions and the cultural values and behaviour attached to these are shown in Table 5 for the seven roles of women identified earlier. This table illustrates that there are clear-cut conflicts between what is prescribed and what is perceived by the society as desirable which conditions the actual behaviour. A step by step listing of all the rights given to women by Islam according to the framework set out in Table 5 would be extremely useful, and can help the policy-planner to deal with role redefinition in an organized and systematic manner. Such an exercise has not been done yet to my knowledge.

To sum up the above discussion, there is no consistent interpretation with regard to the appropriate roles of women on which the religious scholars, the policy-makers, or the ordinary citizens agree. My personal hope for the future is that a consensus that is fair and just (which, in fact, will have to be a true and unbiased abidance to Islam) will emerge soon. However, in order to be just and fair, it must meet the following conditions:

1. It must recognize a woman as a complete human being, having an equal status with man.
2. It must define the roles of women in broader terms than those of a wife and mother. There is no denying the fact that the roles of the two sexes are biologically different; a woman will always remain the mother and the queen of the house. But there are other roles which she can and does combine successfully with the wife-mother role. She is a productive member of the society and must be recognized as such. Furthermore, she should be provided all the opportunities for taking up occupational and community roles, if she chooses to take them up.
3. It must accord all the rights that were granted to her by Islam. This should be done simply because these are her rights and not any special privileges bestowed on her by some philanthropic male. God Himself had given her these rights but history, tradition and ignorance have taken them away from her. It is high time they are restored.

During this process of revaluation of the roles of women, men must also do an objective and thorough evaluation of their own roles in and responsibilities for restoring the rights of women.

Finally, all of the above should be accomplished without generating animosity between the sexes or weakening the family system. There is little danger of this occurring, given the existing cultural values. I agree with Prof. Naqvi that a "[Pakistani woman] is dedicated to her family and is fully cognizant of the great value of the institution of family as a great protector of a woman's social position.

Table 5

Conflicting Prescriptions, Values, and Perceptions for Seven Roles of Pakistani Women

Role	Prescriptions (Islamic)	Values	Perceptions (Actual Behaviour)
Parental Role	1. A Woman must be paid *haq mehr* before divorce[a] 2. If infants/young children are to be cared for by the woman, the father must provide compensation/maintenance to her.	In many cases the family of the divorced woman considers the demand for maintenance to be below their dignity.	Few divorced women are actually provided maintenance for themselves and their children.
Occupational Role	A woman has the right to do work other than housekeeping.	Female work beyond household work as generally perceived as status-reducing and thus not a preferred role.	According to census data, only 5% to 10% of the women aged 10+ are in labour force. Female work is underreported because of the negative value it generally carries.
Conjugal Role	A woman has the right to divorce her husband under specified circumstances.	Divorce for a female is considered shameful. Some women spend their entire lives in a separated state rather than sue for divorce.	Divorce is strongly discourage. Less than 1% of females are reported to be divorced at any age.

– *Continued*

Table 5 – (*Continued*)

Domestic Role	A woman has the right to manage household matters and make the necessary decisions related to such matters.	In some cases, husbands or other family members actually control the finances as well as making decisions.	In cases where women do not have any income of their own, they are completely dependent on the husband for sustenance.
Kin Role	A mother-in-law and daughter-in-law should treat each other with affection and respect.	In many cases, the daughter-in-law is expected to give unconditional obedience while the expectations about reciprocation from mother-in-law are less rigid.	Quarrels between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law are commonplace.
Community Role	A woman has the right to appear as witness and express opinion on community-related developmental issues.	Cultural values strongly discourage the appearance of women in a court of law; it is considered dishonourable.	Very few women actually appear as witnesses.
Individual Role	A woman has the right to receive education; own and dispose of property; approve/disapprove the male chosen for her.	Some girls believe they are not smart enough to receive education; parents in some cases discourage education and have lower aspirations for the education of daughters than for sons.	Only 11% of the Pakistani women aged 10+ are literate; less than half of the urban; and one-tenth of the rural school-age girls are in school.

Source: [13, pp. 29-30].

[a] *Haq mehr* refers to the dowry that a husband agrees to pay the wife at the time the marriage is contracted.

She also knows, *much more than man,* how to strike a balance between her individual freedom and her responsibilities to the family and the society" [11, p. xxvii].

In conclusion, I must say that I feel quite appalled by the lack of progress that has been made in the measurable aspects of women's life I have discussed here today. The clouds surrounding a woman's existence in Pakistan seem to be getting denser, not thinner. Yet, the silver lining to these clouds exists in the form of the government commitment to providing a better world to Pakistani women, and the mild struggle that has begun to fight the unjust treatment. The clouds will lift only through ongoing concerted efforts of all concerned – the government, the community, the men and, above all, the women themselves.

REFERENCES

1. Alam, Iqbal, and Mehtab Karim. "Marriage Patterns, Marital Dissolution, and Remarriage". In Nasra Shah (ed.), *Pakistani Women: A Socioeconomic and Demographic Profile.* Islamabad: Pakistan Institute of Development Economics/Honolulu: East-West Population Institute. 1986.
2. *Dawn* (Daily Newspaper, Karachi). October 29, 1980.
3. Irfan, Mohammad. "The Determinants of Female Labour Force Participation in Pakistan". Islamabad: Pakistan Institute of Development Economics. 1983. (Studies in PLM Project, Report No. 5)
4. Irfan, Mohammad, Lionel Demery and G. M. Arif. "Migration Patterns in Pakistan: Preliminary Results from the PLM Survey, 1979". Islamabad: Pakistan Institute of Development Economics. 1983. (Studies in PLM Project Report No. 6)
5. Khan, Seemin Anwar, and Faiz Bilquees. "The Environment, Attitude and Activities of Rural Women: A Case Study of a Village in Punjab". *Pakistan Development Review.* Vol. XV, No. 3. Autumn 1976.
6. Mahmood, Naushin, and S. M. Ali. "Nuptiality Patterns in Pakistan". Islamabad: Pakistan Institute of Development Economics. 1983. (Studies in PLM Project, Report No. 2)
7. Oppong, Christine. "A Synopsis of Seven Roles and Status of Women: An Outline of a Conceptual and Methodological Approach". Geneva: International Labour Office. 1980. (World Employment Programme, Working Paper No. 94; Mimeographed)
8. Oppong, Christine, and Katharine Abu. *A Handbook for Data Collection and Analysis on Seven Roles and Statuses of Women.* Geneva: International Labour Office. 1985.
9. Pakistan. Planning Commission. *The Sixth Five Year Plan 1983–88.* Islamabad. 1983.

10. Pakistan. Population Census Organization. Statistics Division. *1981 Census Report of Pakistan.* Islamabad. 1984.
11. Shah, Nasra M. (ed.). *Pakistani Women: A Socioeconomic and Demographic Profile.* Islamabad: Pakistan Institute of Development Economics/Honolulu: East-West Population Institute. 1986.
12. Shah, Nasra M. *Women of the World: Asia and Pacific.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. 1985.
13. Shah, Nasra M., and Muhammad Anwar. "Basic Needs, Women, and Development: A Survey of Squatters in Lahore, Pakistan". Honolulu: East-West Population Institute, East-West Center. 1986.
14. Soomro, Ghulam Yasin, and S. M. Ali. "Prevalence of Knowledge and use of Contraception in Pakistan". Islamabad: Pakistan Institute of Development Economics. 1983. (Studies in PLM Project, Report No. 3)

Comments on "Changes in Female Roles in Pakistan: Are the Volume and Pace Adequate?"

To begin with, the topic for the paper is not only ambitious but also ambiguous. With the limitations in data which Nasra Shah admits, perhaps a narrower focus would have provided more clarity and more substance.

Are the volume and pace adequate? With what reference points is this adequacy being assessed? Modernization? Then this needs to be defined in terms of certain conceptual criteria and in terms of some identifiable indices. Economic and social change? This again needs to be defined and identified in terms of clear concepts, criteria and indices, in reference to which adequacy of the change in women's roles could be judged.

In the paper the 'adequacy' has been related to and defined in terms of what in themselves are highly dubious reference points. One is the international frame of reference, i.e. a comparison with countries at similar levels of social and economic development. To have even a cross-country evaluation of change in female roles is in itself a very ambitious and difficult task. The socio-cultural and historical variables that would have to be controlled require a very imaginative conceptual and quantifiable analytical framework.

But to define this cross-country comparison as a reference point for adequacy is almost tautological and in itself quite inadequate. If the statistical criteria indicative of changes in female roles in Pakistan show values which denote progress compared with others, can we say it is adequate in terms of the imperatives of the development process in Pakistan? So many issues of definition, concepts, and data biases enter this kind of analysis that whatever inference is drawn remains at best facile. For example, the definition of female labour force is different in Thailand. The definition in India has been modified between 1971 and 1981, and more attention is paid to capture women's contribution in surveys since then. To compare the contribution of Pakistani women with those of others without taking note of these definitions is not only unjust but also misleading.

The second reference point chosen is the target of change set by policy planners. This is even more dubious, as admitted by the author. So little is available by way of categorical statements backed up with concrete policies and financial

commitment by the policy makers that to use their perception by which to judge what is adequate for Pakistani women would be to fall into the very trap that the author wishes to avoid. In fact, despite public rhetoric, the Sixth Plan document is singularly wanting in special concern for or policy commitment to the interests of women. The chapter on women says very little. The so-called integrated approach has meant that no special provision has been made in sectors other than education and health. They are not treated as a disadvantaged sections of society. The chapters on agriculture, industry and handicrafts, finance, etc., do not recognize the special needs of women or the need to develop special programmes to integrate women in the development process, or the need to prevent their marginalization by gender-specific impact of development programmes. The problem is not peculiar to Pakistan. It is being agitated the world over, especially by women in Third World countries. We in Pakistan do not seem to be aware of it. And if researchers use the same frame of reference as that of policy-makers, then we cannot even begin to study the nature and impact of the discriminatory processes generated by a highly differentiated and discriminatory society against the interests of women, not only as a social category but also in each class or social stratum.

In fact, my major criticism of the paper is based on this inability to move away from outmoded theoretical and difinitional constructs in analysing women's status and participation in social production. The acceptance of the analytical framework by the author, who is aware of the problem in definitions and biases of data against women (for she refers to it quite clearly in her paper), is particularly disappointing. The acknowledgement of data shortcomings, and yet her presentation of analysis based on those very data, gives rise to many contradictory statements in the paper. For example, the definition of 'labour force' used by the data-gathering agencies in Pakistan is based on criteria used by a highly industrialized/commercialized economy. The yardstick of 'working for wages or profits' is used to determine eligibility for inclusion in the 'labour force' or for being regarded as 'economically active'. Most women in our country, who work on farms and family businesses, participating directly in generating the value added in national output, are not captured in the data as they do not fall within the categories recognized under the definition. A few statistics from the Population Census of 1981 would highlight the serious implications of this inability to evaluate women's contribution to national output. Of the 25.8 million women in the age group 10 years and above, only 0.8 million, or 3.2 percent, are shown as 'working' or 'looking for work'. This is the female labour force participation rate that the author compares with that of Thailand, where all women in agricultural households are included in the labour force. In Pakistan, on the other hand, 23.7 million are registered as "house-keeping", of whom 17.5 million are rural women, not eligible to enter the category of those "working" or being "economically productive"! Such is the extent of this invisibility that the

Population Census of 1981 shows only 176 women in the whole of Pakistan as agricultural and animal husbandry workers.

On the basis of such grossly inadequate data, it is difficult to judge the adequacy of changes in women's roles and status in the country.

Department of Economics,
Quaid-i-Azam University,
Islamabad

Nigar Ahmad

Comments on "Changes in Female Roles in Pakistan: Are the Volume and Pace Adequate?"

In my comments on the paper, I am going to deal with the more methodological and data-related issues of the paper. First of all, much as I appreciate Dr Shah's effort to look at the progress of women in a multi-dimensional framework by using Christine Oppong's Seven Roles Framework, I do think that this framework was designed to be used with ethnographic information, focused biographies or at least with data collected through a questionnaire designed specifically for the cultural context being studied. I do not think it is befitting to use Census or national survey data for this reason. The main advantages of the framework are to study conflict between different roles of women and differences between men and women in the seven roles of parenthood, conjugal relationships, kinship, community, occupation, domestic and individual. I think that the main limitation of census or aggregate data is that they do not permit Dr Nasra Shah to utilize the framework for either of these two purposes. Also, unlike Dr Nasra Shah, I do feel that she could compile information on all the roles of Pakistani women using supplementary sources such as small-scale surveys, ethnographies, newspapers, films, etc.

Effectively, the author has compared across two points in time and across countries some important indicators of women's status. This, in itself, is an extremely useful excercise, except for the fact that demographic data are more often than not directly incomparable. No one knows this as well as Dr Shah herself who has worked on several Pakistani data sets. I would, however, like to point out some of the shortcomings of the data used in the paper which I think have led led her to make some erroneous conclusions.

Look at Table 2 and under the heading of parental role: The author finds that the parental role of Pakistani women may have increased because in 1979 the PLM Survey found contraceptive use to have declined and ideal family size to have gone up. The PLM Survey data on specifically these two areas have been analysed critically by the authors of the report themselves and considered erroneous. The year of the survey is given as one reason for the problems with the data collected on contraceptive use and knowledge. The contraceptive prevalence survey done in 1984

has shown that the PLM Survey findings were not predictive of any downward trend in contraceptive use. Regardless of the tenuousness of the PLM Survey findings, I question Dr Shah's conclusion that low contraceptive use and high fertility norms are synonymous with a strong parental role. Could adequate spacing and greater time spent in the care of two rather than five children not be a better indicator of more responsible parenthood?

The other main area where Dr Shah's conclusion, I think, are tenuous is the occupational role of women. The comparison of 1961 and 1981 census data gives the impression of a decline in employment of women. I have not had a chance to compare the two censuses in terms of coverage and definitions, but I do know that the 1981 census has a severe problem of the under-reporting of female labour force participation. Whereas we researchers have been lamenting the unbelievably low labour force participation rates of about 9 percent from previous surveys, we are now faced with a 3 percent labour force participation rate from the 1981 census. Also, the major deficit of female workers is in the rural areas in agricultural occupations. Similar findings in India were explained by displacement of women in agricultural occupations due to mechanization. Such an explanation does not seem to be a strong enough reason for such a large number of rural women having stopped working in Pakistan; for mechanization in the form of threshers etc. occurred after the 1981 census and applies mainly to the single crop of wheat.

Also, it is no accident that we appear to have an "elitist" profile in female employment because it is precisely the formal-sector employment which is likely to get enumerated in censuses. We have only recently done a pilot survey in which we found how difficult it was to locate and sample informal-sector employment amongst women.

Regarding the conjugal role of women, I personally feel that changes in it may have the most important implications for women's status. Not only has the age at marriage been rising in Pakistan since 1951, but this change is more marked for women and therefore the gap between average ages at marriage of men and women is narrowing. Also, the incidence of divorces seems to be on the rise as economic opportunities for separated and divorced women are becoming more readily available.

As regards the kinship role, I would caution Dr Shah against using proportions residing in non-nuclear families as an index of the strength of kinship ties. It is plagued with many definitional and life, cycle, related issues. Also in the case of measuring the community role on the basis of the number of females MNA's it should be remembered that excepting two they are selected rather than elected. Also some mention should be made in this regard of very recently proposed legislature which, without doubt, reduces the legal rights of women and is designed to restrict their role in the community.

Last of all, the individual role perhaps represents the most important step forward for many Pakistani women through the gains made in education. The pace, I agree, is inadequate, but the momentum of change has begun.

If I have sounded too critical, let me hasten to add that I wholly endorse the need for answering the questions posed by Dr Shah. However, I wish to emphasize the importance of using a better methodology, a reliable data set and scientifically acceptable evidence for finding the answers sought by Dr Nasra Shah.

Pakistan Institute
of Development Economics,
Islamabad

Zeba A. Sathar